

U.S. VA History SOL VUS 4a,b,c

The Revolutionary War Period

New political ideas about the relationship between people and their government helped to justify the Declaration of Independence. The revolutionary generation formulated the political philosophy and laid the institutional foundations for the system of government under which we live. The American Revolution was inspired by ideas concerning natural rights and political authority, and its successful completion affected people and governments throughout the world for many generations.

The period known as the “Enlightenment” in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries saw the development of new ideas about the rights of people and their relationship to their rulers.

John Locke and Natural Rights

John Locke was an Enlightenment philosopher whose ideas, more than any other’s, influenced the American belief in self-government. Locke wrote that:

- All people are free, equal, and have “natural rights” of life, liberty, and property that rulers cannot take away.
- All original power resides in the people, and they consent to enter into a “social contract” among themselves to form a government to protect their rights. In return, the people promise to obey the laws and rules established by their government, establishing a system of “ordered liberty.”
- Government’s powers are limited to those the people have consented to give to it.
- Whenever government becomes a threat to the people’s natural rights, it breaks the social contract and the people have the right to alter or overthrow it.

Locke’s ideas about the sovereignty and rights of the people were radical and challenged the centuries-old practice throughout the world of dictatorial rule by kings, emperors, and tribal chieftains.

Thomas Paine and *Common Sense*

Thomas Paine was an English immigrant to America who produced a pamphlet known as *Common Sense* that challenged the rule of the American colonies by the King of England. *Common Sense* was read and acclaimed by many American colonists during the mid-1700s and contributed to a growing sentiment for independence from Great Britain.

The Declaration of Independence

The eventual draft of the Declaration of Independence, authored by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, reflected the ideas of Locke and Paine:

- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
- “That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”
- “That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government...”

Jefferson then went on to detail many of the grievances against the king that Paine had earlier

described in *Common Sense*.

The ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence contradicted the realities of slavery and the undemocratic nature of political participation in the early decades of the new republic.

The key principles of the Declaration of Independence increased political, social, and economic participation in the American experience over a period of time.

- Political participation (equality)
 - Extending the franchise –allowing more people to vote
 - Upholding due process of law – laws should be applied equally to all people
 - Providing free public education
- Social participation (liberty)
 - Abolishing slavery
 - Extending civil rights to women and other groups
- Economic participation (pursuit of happiness)
 - Regulating the free enterprise system – creating a free environment for equal participation
 - Promoting economic opportunity
 - Protecting property rights

Political Differences

The ideas of the Enlightenment and the perceived unfairness of British policies provoked debate and resistance by the American colonists. The rivalry in North America between England and France led to the French and Indian War, in which the French were driven out of Canada and their territories west of the Appalachian Mountains.

As a result of the war, England took several actions that angered the American colonies and led to the American Revolution. These included:

- The Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains, a region that was costly for the British to protect.
- New taxes on legal documents (the “Stamp Act”), tea and sugar, to pay costs incurred during the French and Indian War and for British troops to protect colonists.

The Beginning of the American Revolution

Resistance to British rule in the colonies mounted and the following actions by the American colonists led to war:

- The Boston Tea Party was staged.
- The First Continental Congress was called, to which all of the colonies except Georgia sent representatives, the first time most of the colonies had acted together.
- The Boston Massacre took place when British troops fired on anti-British demonstrators.
- War began when the “Minutemen” in Massachusetts fought a brief skirmish with British troops at Lexington and Concord the “Shots heard ‘Round the World”.

Differences among the Colonists

The colonists were divided into three main camps during the Revolution:

- **Patriots**
 - Believed in complete independence from England
 - Inspired by the ideas of Locke and Paine and the words of Virginian Patrick Henry (“Give me liberty, or give me death!”)
 - Provided the troops for the American Army, led by George Washington, also of Virginia

- **Loyalists (Tories)**
 - Remained loyal to Britain, based on cultural and economic ties
 - Believed that taxation of the colonies was justified to pay for British troops to protect American settlers from Indian attacks
- **Neutrals**
 - The many colonists who tried to stay as uninvolved in the war as possible

Colonial Victory

The American rebels won their independence because the British government grew tired of the struggle soon after the French agreed to help the Americans after the battle of Saratoga, called the turning point of the Revolutionary War. The French signed a Treaty of Alliance with the United States. Factors that led to colonial victory can be classified as diplomatic and military.

Diplomatic

- Benjamin Franklin negotiated a Treaty of Alliance with France.
- The war did not have popular support in Great Britain.

Military

- George Washington, general of the American army, avoided any situation that threatened the destruction of his army, and his leadership kept the army together when defeat seemed inevitable.
- Americans benefited from the presence of the French army and navy at the Battle of Yorktown, which ended the war with an American victory.

Answer the following questions from the reading:

1. *Who was John Locke and what role did he play in America's Revolution?*

2. *Outline four of Locke's philosophies:*

a.

b.

c.

d.

3. *Who was Thomas Pane and what role did he play in America's Revolution?*

4. *How did Thomas Jefferson incorporate the ideas of Lock and Pane in the Declaration of Independence? Cite three examples:*

a.

b.

c.

5. *"The ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence contradicted the realities of slavery and the undemocratic nature of political participation in the early decades of the new republic". Explain in your own words what this means and cite an example to support each contention.*

6. *What was the result of the French and Indian War?*

7. List and describe two actions that England took that angered the American colonies, which eventually led to the American Revolution:

a.

b.

8. Describe four actions that American colonists took that led to the American Revolution:

a.

b.

c.

d.

9. Describe the differences between Loyalists, Patriots, and Neutralists:

10. What battle was the turning point that caused the French to aid the United States?

11. What was the Treaty of Alliance?

12. Why was George Washington considered a great general?

13. What effect did the French have on the outcome of the American Revolution?

14. Which battle ended the war with an American victory?

15. Identify the following terms:

Enlightenment

Natural rights

Common Sense

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